



Topic Brief: COVID-19 Safety

Date: 5/20/20

Nomination Number: 908

Purpose: This document summarizes the information addressing a nomination submitted on 5/20/20 through the Effective Health Care Website. This information was used to inform the Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC) Program decisions about whether to produce an evidence report on the topic, and if so, what type of evidence report would be most suitable.

Issue: The nominator is concerned about safety from COVID-19 in the workplace, and suggests that people should have negative coronavirus testing before returning to the workplace.

Program Decision: There is much that is unknown about COVID-19, testing, and protective immunity. Policymaking is outside the scope of AHRQ and the EPC Program. Primary research is underway that could address the nominator's concerns. A new systematic review by the EPC Program is not feasible at this time.

Background

- There is widespread ongoing transmission of a respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. The disease has been named "coronavirus disease 2019" (abbreviated "COVID-19").
- Guidelines are being developed around normalizing activities while minimizing the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission.
- There are two types of testing for COVID-19.¹ One is a viral test, through a nasal swab or saliva sample,² that indicates if someone is currently infected; and the other is an antibody test, through a blood sample, that indicates if someone has had the infection in the past.^{3, 4}
- It is unknown at this time if having antibodies to the virus is protective of future infection, or how long that protection might last.¹
- This is a rapidly growing area of research, and evidence being added to aid our understanding of the transmission of this novel Coronavirus, and how to prevent spread of the disease.

Assessment Methods

We assessed nomination for priority for a systematic review or other AHRQ EHC report with a hierarchical process using established selection criteria. Assessment of each criteria determined the need to evaluate the next one.

1. Determine the *appropriateness* of the nominated topic for inclusion in the EHC program.
2. Establish the overall *importance* of a potential topic as representing a health or healthcare issue in the United States.

3. Determine the *desirability of new evidence review* by examining whether a new systematic review or other AHRQ product would be duplicative.
4. Assess the *potential impact* a new systematic review or other AHRQ product.
5. Assess whether the *current state of the evidence* allows for a systematic review or other AHRQ product (feasibility).
6. Determine the *potential value* of a new systematic review or other AHRQ product.

Summary of Selection Criteria Assessment

This is an important concern. It is unknown if antibodies that result from SARS-CoV-2 infection provide immunity from a future infection. Furthermore if antibodies do provide immunity, it is unknown what titer or amount of antibodies would be protective or how long that protection would last.¹

This is a rapidly growing area of research, and evidence is being added to our understanding of COVID-19 and testing. We identified 11 relevant studies of COVID-19 antibody tests in Clinicaltrials.gov (Appendix A).

The EPC Program develops evidence reviews to inform healthcare decisionmaking by a broad range of stakeholders including patient, clinicians, health systems and policymakers. Policymaking is outside the scope of AHRQ and the EPC Program.

Related Resources

The CDC has developed guidance for businesses and workplaces around COVID-19

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html>

The CDC has also developed guidance to assist states to open

- <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s0520-cdc-resources-open.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/open-america/index.html>

References

1. Testing for COVID-19. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/testing.html>. Accessed on 21 May 2020.
2. Coronavirus Disease 2019: Test for Current Infection. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/testing/diagnostic-testing.html>. Accessed on 21 May 2020.
3. Coronavirus Disease 2019: Test for Past Infection. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/testing/serology-overview.html>. Accessed on 21 May 2020.
4. Guidance on Interpreting COVID-19 Test Results. Washington, DC: White House; 2020. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Testing-Guidance.pdf>.

Author

Christine Chang, MD, MPH

Conflict of Interest: None of the investigators have any affiliations or financial involvement that conflicts with the material presented in this report.

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Appendix A: Ongoing Studies in Clinicaltrials.gov

1. COVID-19 Staff Testing of Antibody Responses Study (Co-Stars) (Co-Stars) [NCT04380896](#)
 2. Rapid SARS-CoV-2 IgG Antibody Testing in High Risk Healthcare Workers (COVID-Antibody) [NCT04334876](#)
 3. Screening for SARS-CoV-2-Infections and Monitoring of Serological Responses to SARS-CoV-2 in Healthcare Workers (SeCo) [NCT04370119](#)
 4. Serologic Surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) in a Prospective Cohort of Health Care Workers [NCT04387890](#)
 5. Antibody Seroprevalence and Rate of Asymptomatic Infections With SARS-CoV-2 in Austrian Hospital Personnel. [NCT04354779](#)
 6. Detection of Anti-COVID-19 Antibody Levels in an Hospital Population [NCT04387929](#)
 7. Atrium COVID-19 Syndromic and Serologic Surveillance [NCT04361123](#)
 8. Beaumont Health Large-scale Automated Serologic Testing for COVID-19 (BLAST COVID-19) [NCT04349202](#)
 9. COVID-19: Investigation of Transmission and Immunisation Among Hospital Staff [NCT04346186](#)
 10. A Longitudinal Study of COVID-19 Positive Patients Testing Nasal Swabs and Collecting Blood Samples for Research [NCT04327804](#)
 11. Assessment of Incidence of SARS-CoV-2 Infection and COVID-19 in Brazil (AVISA) (AVISA) [NCT04355338](#)
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